

The Gospel Announced: The Gospel Does Not Fail

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[0 : 00] Let's skip the page number. We're reading from Romans chapter 9, which is on page 1135 in the Red Bibles.

So page 1135. Romans chapter 9. Starting in verse 1.

I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption of sons.

Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs. And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised.

[1 : 08] Amen. It is not as though God's word had failed, for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children.

On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

For this was how the promise was stated. At the appointed time, I will return and Sarah will have a son. Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.

Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger, just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.

Well, if the end of that reading troubled you, it's been troubling me all week, so we need to pray and ask for God's help.

[2 : 50] It is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Father, we confess that your word does speak truth.

It tells us about you, and it tells us about ourselves. And sometimes it is hard for us to grasp and understand, and so this morning we pray, would you please pour out your spirit upon us, so that our minds understand what is difficult in your word.

But we also ask that you would pour your spirit into our hearts, so that we accept the things that you say, and we pray that this would change our lives, so that we love you more, and that we love others more, especially that we would love those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus.

Father, please be gracious to us this morning. And speak to us afresh, through your word, for it is truth, and it is good for us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, just over a year ago, the news broke of a very tragic farming accident.

[4 : 39] You probably remember it. Three members of the Spence family, the father and two sons, died in an attempt to rescue each other when one had fallen into a slurry tank.

Knowing the dangers, but without a second thought, one followed the other to try and save their father. Their actions revealed their heart.

They had a deep love for each other. They were willing to lose their life in an attempt to save the life of another.

Now, Paul has that same kind of heart too. Look at verse 1. He says, As I speak the truth in Christ, I have something really important to tell you.

I'm not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit, in the Spirit. This is serious. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

[5 : 49] Well, what is it that's burdening his heart? What is it that's troubling him? Well, look at verse 3. He says, For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

Do you see what he's saying in verse 3? He says, I am willing to go to hell. I would be willing to be cut off from Christ if it means my people become Christians.

I would be ready, he's saying, to have the gift of eternal life taken away from me if it means that somebody from my family gets eternal life.

Looking back on that farming tragedy, we might think it crazy for somebody to jump into a slurry tank and lose their life. But the thing is, when you have a big heart, when you see your loved ones in trouble, you will do anything.

We're going to look at four big things that flow from this text this morning. And the first big one is this. Christians long for other people to become Christians.

[7 : 31] You see, this is what's Paul's great desire. His big longing is that his own people become Christians. Look at chapter 10 and verse 1.

He says, Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. Or chapter 11, verse 14.

He says, It's my hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. Now, if you're a Christian, you will identify with Paul's heart because there is no greater agony, there is no greater pain or heartache than to have friends or family who do not yet know and love the Lord Jesus.

Look again what he says in chapter 9, verse 2. He says, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

[8 : 44] I long that my mum or dad or maybe it's your sister or maybe it's one of your own children or maybe you're thinking of a friend that you work with and it's your longing and your desire and your heartache for them to become Christians.

You see, this is a serious matter. Go back to chapter 2 and verse 5. It's a serious matter.

It's weighing on his heart because it has an eternal consequence. Romans chapter 2, verse 5. He's already spoken about this.

Romans 2, verse 5. Because of our stubbornness, because of our unrepentant heart, we're storing up wrath against ourselves for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed. Verse 16. This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secret thoughts through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares.

[10 : 12] Do you see? It's a serious matter. And with that in mind, our heart's desire is that people would come to know the joy and the beauty of the gospel.

that people would see that in Jesus, which is what Romans 1 through to 8 has been telling us, that in Jesus there is forgiveness, that there's peace with God, that we can have a brand new beginning, that we can be welcomed and treasured as God's children and be given the guarantee of eternal life.

of course, Paul's wish in verse 3 of chapter 9, his wish that he could be cut off from Christ, he knows and we know that he can't do that.

It is just simply expressing what we all feel as we think about our friends and our family who are not yet Christians. You see, there is nothing more important in this life than to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Don't you long for the day? Hasn't your heart ached? Haven't you shed tears for people who don't yet follow Jesus?

[11 : 36] Christians always long for other people to become Christians. The second big thing that we want to take from this this morning is that people who don't become Christians can't blame God.

People who don't become Christians can't blame God. You see, while we may desperately want to become Christians or want others to become Christians, we can never blame God if they don't.

It's not God's fault. Look at verse 4. Chapter 9. Here Paul is looking at the privileges and the opportunities that his own people have had.

Verse 4. He says, theirs is the adoption of sons. It's talking about the privileged relationship that they had with God. There's the divine glory.

In other words, they had known God's presence come down amongst his people. There's the covenants. They knew about God's commitment to them. They had the receiving of the law that

God had spoken to them and had given them his very word.

[12:54] They had the temple worship and the promises. The promises of Jesus to come and the gospel that was to come. There's, verse 5, are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ who is God over all forever praised.

Amen. You see, they've been given every opportunity possible, including the fact that Jesus is one of their own people and they could trace his family line all the way through.

But even though they had heard the gospel, even though they'd had the promises of it all, even though they have this rich history and heritage, they still do not love the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps there's someone in your family who has heard many times, but still they are not believers. believers. Maybe you're like that. Maybe you're here and you've heard the truth many times, but yet you still don't believe.

[14:11] Well, if we don't believe, and as much as it may weigh on our hearts, we can never turn round and point the finger and say it's God's fault, he's failed, he's let us down.

Look at verse 6, because he says this, it is not as though God's word had failed. God has not stopped working.

The gospel does not fail. You see, people become Christians not just when they hear the good news, but when they also combine it with faith.

again, look at the pattern we have in verse 4. He's listing all the privileges, all the opportunities. They have this and they have that. And we could say where they went to church, they've had the Bible, they took communion, they were taught in Sunday school, they went here, they went there. But look how this list of privileges finishes in verse 5. It says, and from them is traced the ancestry of Christ. He doesn't say Christ is theirs, or that they have Christ, he simply just says Christ came from them.

[15:30] In other words, Jesus doesn't belong to them, and they don't belong to him, because they have never ever joined themselves in faith or by faith to Jesus.

Despite all the privileges and all the opportunities, they have never responded in faith and trusted Jesus.

You see, we can have all the opportunities and all the privileges, but it will count for nothing until there is faith.

So people who don't become Christians can't blame God. The third big thing we want to learn this morning is this, that becoming a Christian is always God's work and not our own.

It's always something God does, not something we do. You see, even though we may fail to respond as we should, even though God in his goodness has given opportunity after opportunity, he doesn't stop making people Christians.

[16:54] He still keeps on working in people's lives. That's the point of verse 6, it's not as though God's word had failed. So two things from this we want to learn.

First, becoming a Christian is dependent on God's gracious promise. Becoming a Christian is dependent on God's gracious promise.

Let's read verse 6 again. It is not as though God's word had failed, for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Now, that sounds confusing, that last little statement, but this is what he's saying.

Just because you've heard the good news about Jesus, just because you've had this privilege and this background, doesn't mean to say that you will automatically be a Christian.

So, how do you become a Christian? Well, read on, verse 7, Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

[17:59] Now, again, it's confusing, it's difficult to get our heads around it, but one way to help us to do this is to think back to the story in Genesis where we read about the beginning of Israel and Abraham and his first children.

Because in that story in Genesis we read that Abraham had two sons. The first son he called Ishmael. The second son he called Isaac, that's being referred to here in verse 7.

They're both physical descendants of Abraham. Abraham is their dad. They both, if you like, had the same opportunities, the same privileges.

However, only one of them belonged to the true people of God. Only one, if you like, became a Christian and that was Isaac. Why? Because God had given the promise of salvation to one but not

to the other.

look at verse 8. In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

[19 : 17] The true people of God or people who become Christians are those who are dependent on God's gracious promise to us.

it is never about our privileged position before him. You see, some people think, like the Jewish people here in this passage, that it is all about position, it is all about privilege.

So people could say, oh well I am a Protestant or I am a Catholic or I am a Baptist, but the point is it does not matter what your pedigree is, it does not matter what your position is, salvation only comes to us because God promises it.

Look at verse 9, for this is how the promise was stated, at that appointed time I will return and Sarah will have a son.

Again, if we are to go back into that story, we remember that Abraham and his wife Sarah at this time were very, very old. Sarah was well past the age of having children.

[20 : 26] It was physically and biologically impossible for her to have a child. But God had made a promise to them and said that I'm going to come back and at that time when I return you will have a child because what was impossible for Sarah suddenly became possible through God's promise.

And this is illustrating the fact that salvation is only possible because of God's promise to us, not because of our privileged position.

In other words, becoming a Christian is always God's work. And this is repeated again, but in a slightly different way.

Becoming a Christian is not just dependent on God's gracious promise, it's dependent on God's gracious choice. Look at verse 10. Not only that, he continues, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac.

You see, as we follow the story through of Abraham and Sarah and the two children, in this case, Isaac, well, we learn that Isaac also had two sons.

[21 : 49] In fact, these two sons were twins. They were called Esau and Jacob. So if Isaac had received the promise of salvation, does that mean his children will also have the automatic right to salvation?

Well, look what it says in verse 11. Yet, before the twins were born, or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand, or to put it this way, in order that God's purpose might be driven by his choice.

Not by works, but by him who calls people. She was told the older will serve the younger. God made a choice.

And I know we find that hard to take in. I know we're struggling to hear that. But according to God's purpose, he chose between the two boys, between the two twins, he chose one and not the other to receive his salvation.

Verse 13, just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hate it.

[23 : 24] What? Are you sure that's what it says? I thought God loved everybody. What does the great verse say?

That God loved the world. how can God hate someone? Well, the sense is something like this, that Jacob I have chosen, but Esau I've rejected.

Jesus said the same kind of thing. Keep your finger there in Romans 9 and go back to John chapter 6. John's gospel chapter 6.

John's gospel chapter 6 verse 37.

This is Jesus speaking about those who will come to him, those who will be Christians. John chapter 6 verse 37. Jesus says all that the father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

[24 : 44] Verse 39. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

God's will, God's purpose, God's choice to call people to himself.

And that's what Paul is. He's essentially saying the same thing here. in other words, God has chosen to give his saving love to some and not to others.

And we may think, well, if God made a choice like this, maybe it's because Jacob must have been a better boy when he was growing up. Or maybe it was because God knew that one day Jacob would

trust in God and he knew how he was going to turn out and that's why he chose him. Well, it's got nothing to do with those things. It's got nothing to do with our character. Look at what it says in verse 11. This is Romans 9 verse 11. Yet before the twins were born, before they were born, or had done anything good or bad, before they even had an opportunity to come running in and say something nice or to throw a tantrum, God made his choice.

[26 : 22] It wasn't as if God looked down and said, oh, Jacob is going to be a good boy, I'm going to choose him, or Esau isn't going to believe in me, so I won't choose him. No, the point is this, that becoming a Christian depends on God's gracious choice of us, not our character, not about who I am.

Becoming a Christian is always God's work. And the fourth thing that we want to take from this is this, that although these things we're struggling with, and I know you've got questions, and I know there's lots of puzzles that we're trying to work out here, but if we try and work all those things out, in some sense we'll get bogged down.

And what we need to try and do is to accept and to go with it, because if we hear what God is saying to us, it will change our lives in an incredible way.

It will change our lives in an incredible way. Three things that this will change our lives. The first is this, it creates humility.

It creates humility. You see, if God has made me a Christian, that means there is nothing in my life that I can point to and say, God made me a Christian because, or God chose me because I was a good boy.

[28 : 11] If you're a Christian, it's not because of who you are or what you've done, or because you've decided to do something, it's simply because God chose to give his love to you.

have a look back in Deuteronomy chapter 7. Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verse 7.

Deuteronomy 7, verse 7. Deuteronomy The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than all the other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

In other words, he didn't choose you because of anything about you, but, verse 8, it was because the Lord loved you. You see, the question here is not what about everybody else.

The amazing thing is, is that why would God love me? Why would he love me? That's what's amazing. And if we can grasp that, then it takes away all notions of superiority.

[29 : 43] That means I can never ever look down on somebody and say, I'm better than you because I'm a Christian or because I chose to follow or because God saw something beautiful in me.

It just creates humility. It makes me love other people and serve them and care for them in the same way in which God did that unconditionally for me.

So first, it creates humility. Second, it brings about security. You see, if God has made me a Christian, then salvation is not dependent on me.

If I chose to become a Christian, if it was about me, then that means I can choose not to be a Christian. So I can kind of jump in and be a Christian and then decide at a later point not to be a Christian.

Now, I don't know about you, but I've got an issue about that because I choose to sin every single day. I choose to disobey. I choose to ignore God's word.

[30 : 51] So am I in or am I out because of my choices? But if I understand that it is God who chose me, then my salvation is not dependent on how good I am or how bad I am, but God has promised to me.

He chose me. And that means I'm secure forever no matter if I failed or whether I've been a good boy. Romans 8 verse 38.

This is why he can say this. Romans 8 verse 38, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither heights nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why will we not be separated? Because of the work God has done in our lives. And then the last thing that it brings about is it leads to responsibility.

If I am a Christian, then this truth will change my heart and give me an incredible love for other people who are not yet Christians.

[32 : 12] That's how this text all started in verse 3. As Paul looked in at his own heart, the great sorrow and unceasing anguish that he had, how he wishes that he could be cut off from Christ so that others would become Christians.

Christians. And here's the wonderful thing, that if you are a Christian, God has chosen you and God has called you to be his witness where you are amongst those people who are not yet Christians. Maybe you're the only one who is a Christian at this time in your family. perhaps you're the only one who believes when you go into your workplace. Maybe you're the only Christian in your neighbourhood.

God has chosen you and God has called you and he's called me so that we would be his witness placed in the middle of all those people so that through you they can hear the good news and respond in faith and become Christians to.

It is puzzling. It raises questions. But let these three things that we've just touched on at the end settle in your hearts.

[33 : 43] God has called you to be a Christian. He has chosen you and it brings about humility. It brings security. But it leads to responsibility.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we prayed at the beginning that your word is truth.

And there are many things that are in it that are confusing to our own minds. And there are many things that we find it hard to accept in our own hearts.

things that are faithful to us. And so we pray for your ongoing work of your spirit to bring clarity and to bring acceptance in our hearts.

And that above all that we would be people who bow in humility before you and thank you for our amazing salvation, for your amazing love.

[35 : 06] and to know that no matter what, whether I've had a bad week or a good week, that your love still remains and we are secure.

And in the knowledge that you will go on making Christians and that your gospel has not failed, help us that we may go out into this week with a message and with a truth about the Lord Jesus.

Help us as we go, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.